

6486
THE
ETERNAL GENERATION
OF THE
SON OF GOD.

A
SERMON
PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
AT ST. MARY'S,

On SUNDAY the 8th of NOVEMBER, 1795.

BY
WILLIAM
S. Cleaver
LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER,
PRINCIPAL OF BRAZENOSE COLLEGE.

OXFORD:
PRINTED FOR FLETCHER AND HANWELL;

AND SOLD BY MESSRS. RIVINGTONS, IN LONDON;
AND BROSTER, IN CHESTER.

M DCC XCV.

THE
JOURNAL OF THE
ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

VOLUME 10

PART I

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



PRINTED BY

WILLIAM

FOR THE

INSTITUTION

OXFORD

PRINTED BY

AND SONS

1880

L. Whalley,
Eton.

Brought from Oxford
and given me by
son Thomas, 15th Dec^r
1795.

IMPRIMATUR,

JOHAN. WILLS,

WAD. COLL.
Dec. 1, 1795.

Vice-Can. OXON.

[Faint, mostly illegible handwritten text at the top of the page]

Wm. Wills,
Vice-Chairman, Oxon.



Wm. Wills,
Vice-Chairman, Oxon.

HEBREWS i. 18.

*But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God,
endureth for ever.*

WHATEVER reputation the adversaries of our faith may have of late years gained amongst the unlearned and unthinking, amongst those, who, from their habits of life, must necessarily take their religious principles upon authority, as well as those, who, from want of due pains, do voluntarily lend themselves in matters of such high importance to opinions unexamined, the great doctrines of our Religion have certainly within the same period reaped much advantage, in point of argument from the talents and erudition of those, whose exertions have been called forth in its defence.

The Divinity of our Lord, that great principle, upon which the primary benefits of Christianity depend, seems particularly to justify this remark. For though our Lord hath never left himself without that testimony of

B

his

his Godhead, which drew from St. Peter so early and decided a declaration of it, and from St. Thomas so sudden and explicit an act of adoration; though this doctrine of the Apostles has been received and avowed by the uninterrupted voice of the Catholic Church; yet within the space of a century have its proofs been multiplied, and its evidences illustrated from Scripture, in proportion to the pains taken by some, to refute, to confound, or to obscure this truth.

It is observable likewise, that Religion hath received another material advantage, though indirectly, from the same quarter.

The prevailing eagerness to decry all mystery, and the popular practice of releasing the unlearned and unwary from an obligation to give credit to any proposition upon testimony, where the matter of the proposition is beyond their comprehension, have rendered it a duty in those, who would preserve their own faith inviolate, or maintain the influence of any kind of religion in the minds of mankind at large, to submit the nature, the extent and province, or what would now be called by some the *Rights*, of human reason to a constant and repeated examination. And the result of this examination hath been universally and uniformly with every wise and sober inquirer, that

that so far as regards Revelation, or any system assuming that title, if it contradict not those first principles, which are themselves the very means and measures, by which we are to judge of any religious proposition, the business of Reason is simply to decide upon the evidences offered in proof of its divine original, to judge of the authenticity of the writings claiming divine authority, and to apply to them the obvious and ordinary means of interpretation. But that when its congruity with those first principles, the proofs of its divine original, the authenticity of the volume, and the sense and meaning of its pages are once thus carefully ascertained, and satisfactorily determined, by the due use of our reason; the Truth and Consistency of the doctrines contained therein follow *ex hypothesi*: because they are contained in a revelation from God.

To sit in judgment, therefore, upon these so circumstanced, is evidently to sit in judgment upon the truth and consistency of what God has been pleased to declare expressly by a revelation. To doubt of propositions so offered, is to doubt upon the matter of the revelation acknowledged to be divine. But as this is that kind of absurdity which perhaps cannot be supposed to take place actu-

ally in the mind of any man; the doubt will be found really to revert upon some one or all of the steps in the argument, by which the propositions were proved to be divine. And indeed the plain fact is, that when reason has deliberated on a proposition, and determined it, whether justly or unjustly, to be impossible, no proof, however binding and irrefragable, can produce conviction. The general question, therefore, with infidels of every description, is exactly concerning what shall be deemed so far impossible as to be incapable of proof by any evidence whatever. We say, and I trust we say wisely and truly, that it is no vindication of unbelief, that propositions being above human conception, or comprehension, have a seeming incompatibility, when compared one with another: that, if they are proved, by the ordinary and legitimate rules of sound reason, to come from God, they must be received implicitly as such in the form in which they are offered to us: and that, if we are imperfectly informed, what relation they bear to each other, we are nowhere required to reconcile the difficulties attending them when so compared.

Indeed the attempt to reconcile difficulties in matters above our comprehension, is more than we think necessary in some truths, which,

which, whether derived from Reason or Revelation, are yet generally admitted.

Who, for instance, endeavours to reconcile the apparent contrariety between the necessity of a first cause and the impossibility, as it regards our conceptions, of a self-existent Being? Or who sees not the necessity of acknowledging an Almighty Creator? Yet the power of creating every thing out of nothing is to us perfectly incomprehensible. From whence we may see how little we have the means of judging what is really impossible in matters which lie above our conception; and how little, as sober Philosophers, we can in matters of Revelation justify doubts founded in the difficulties arising from the subject matter of the proposition offered to our belief. For as every thing possible is credible upon good testimony, so is every thing possible even in our conceptions, of which we do not see the clear and direct impossibility, which we can do only in subjects of which we have a competent knowledge. To refuse therefore our assent upon this ground to any proposition claiming the authority of Revelation, may be to resist a clear and direct testimony of what is no way impossible; or rather, to resist the evidence of Testimony relating to matters in themselves incomprehensible, is to

resist proof of what can be no way improbable.

For example, an Unity of substance, and a Trinity of Persons in the Divine Nature, are both objects of Faith; both the discoveries not of reason, but of Revelation. Suppose them proposed to us without the authority of Revelation, the one could only be proved to be probable, the other could in no way be proved to be improbable. If therefore they are communicated with equal clearness in Scripture, they are equally intitled to our belief upon the ground of Testimony: and to deny one upon the same evidence upon which we admit the other, is not simply inconsistent, and to be vindicated upon no principle of reason whatever; but it is to set aside one great purpose of Revelation, which has been to communicate to us truths, which otherwise we could never have known, as having no discernible connection with the ordinary course of nature.

It may seem strange that the friends of Religion have not been more upon their guard against this kind of inconsistency in principle: yet it is to be regretted, that they have too often overlooked the obvious acceptation of Scripture, in order to modify the relations, which the Persons in the Divine Nature bear
to

to each other, in hopes of gaining a readier assent to the real truths of Revelation.

With this view exactly it is, that a learned and respectable Writer, who contends strenuously for the conclusion, that "Jesus * is God," "because he is declared to be the Son of God," hath adopted the hypothesis, that the term "Son† was first assumed when the Word was "made flesh, and therefore that the Word "was not necessarily the Son;" an hypothesis, by which he conceives, "if it may be admitted, "many difficulties will be removed‡;" but one, in fact, which is in other words to deny the doctrine of the Eternal Generation of the Son, a doctrine, which, he says §, favours the cause of Arianism; "for if it is true," he adds, "then Christ was always, as being a Son, subordinate and inferior to the Father; then was "he always also, as having the Divine Nature "by Necessity, an inferior, subordinate God, "which, he apprehends, was the doctrine of "Arius ||." It were easy to oppose a variety of answers to this mode of reasoning, which, far

* Θεοῦ γεννητός τῆς αἰῶνος Διαθήκης, or, An Appeal to the New Testament in Proof of the Divinity of the Son of God. By Charles Hawtrey, M. A. London, 1794. P. 118.

† P. 39.

‡ P. 38.

§ P. 185.

|| Mr. Hawtrey does not, I apprehend, mean that the doctrine of Arius allowed Christ to have had the Divine Nature by Necessity, but only that he was an inferior and subordinate God.

from “ removing many difficulties,” would increase the number. I will only remark, that whosoever of necessity partakes of the Unity of the Divine Nature, cannot (I speak as it regards human apprehension) be otherwise inferior than in the idea of order. A subordinate God, if by that term be meant one in any other sense inferior, cannot of necessity participate the Divine Nature. But I forbear all disquisition on the foot of reason upon a principle already laid down, and in which I have the explicit concurrence of this learned Author, who says justly, “ the whole of the
 “ matter upon subjects of this nature will turn
 “ upon this single question, “ Is the doctrine,
 “ or is it not, a communication from God*?”

To give this question a solution founded on the fullest inquiry, it would be requisite to enter upon an examination of the whole of divine Revelation. For although it will not be expected that the notices of this subject should either be so obvious, or so frequent, in the books of the Old Testament as in those of the New; yet the learned have always found in them, what have been considered as no obscure arguments for the truth of this doctrine.

* P. 138.

The Gospels would next claim our consideration, with a view particularly to the language and conversation of our Lord, in those passages where he is induced to assert the proper Divinity of his nature.

Then would follow an attention to the writings of the Apostles; from whom it may be expected, that the doctrine, if true, will be more explicitly delivered.

Our Author's remarks upon the Nicene Creed have further made it in some sort expedient to examine the writings of the earlier Fathers; who at the lowest must be considered as good witnesses of the doctrine of the Primitive Church, in proportion as they lived more or less near to the time of the Apostles.

It will have occurred, that the ground of inquiry thus traced out is too extensive for the present occasion: indeed I hope to shew, that the argument lies in a much less compass, and may be satisfactorily discussed in the examination of a very few passages of the New Testament, from some of those even which this writer hath produced as most favourable to his hypothesis; and that if we should allow the justice of his remarks upon the Nicene Creed, this Creed would still indisputably contain the same doctrine.

In

In the mean time let it be premised, that the very expression, or term, Son, obviously implies, in its proper sense, a natural, not an occasional relation, or an accessory title, which can only be understood when the term is expressly so qualified by other terms of the context, or the known circumstances of the subject so described.

I believe, moreover, I shall assume no more than what will be found strictly and accurately just, if I assert, that the first and obvious sense in all the passages of the New Testament, wherein our Lord is mentioned as Son of God, either directly by a voice from Heaven, or by himself, or by his Apostles, if I assert, that the first and obvious sense of all these passages, except perhaps one only, implies his filial relation to the Father, antecedently to his incarnation, when the Word became flesh; passages these so numerous, that, uncontradicted and unopposed as they are by any other parts of Scripture, it may well seem wonderful, that the subject, considered upon the evidence of Scripture, could ever afford a question.

Indeed this antecedent relation seems so to pervade the whole of Revelation, that it appears to be prefigured, even Typically, as early as in the history of Abraham. For in the
 blessing

blessing promised to this Patriarch as a reward of his singular faith and obedience in the proposed sacrifice of his Son; it is stated as the motive on God's part, "That Abraham had not withheld his Son, his only Son," in order as it were to fix the attention of future ages upon the two leading features in the resemblance which Isaac bore to their promised Messias, who was to be an only Son, and to be offered for a Sacrifice. Yet the relation signified by the Type of an only Son of an human Father did not exist in the Antitype, if that relation be not essential to the Son of God, and inherent in his nature. And the cheerful and ready surrender of this only Son made on the part of Abraham, the very ground and motive of his blessing, no longer typifies that stupendous act of mercy, wherein God is said by our Lord himself to have given his only-begotten Son *, if this only-begotten Son then first assumed the occasional relation, when he was sent into the World as Man.

The same truth seems to be conveyed, in a similar manner, in the Parable of the Vineyard, where the character of the beloved Son so evidently represented that of our Lord, that the

* John iii. 16.

Jews present deprecated the punishment due to the Murderers, who are there said to have killed the Son of this Lord of the Vineyard. Yet if our Lord's claim to the relation of Son be accessory only, the comparison will neither appear obvious nor natural.

St. Paul, in a stile of animation peculiarly eloquent, argues upon the same principle, from the analogy between the filial relation of our Lord to the Father, and that of an human Son to an human Father.

“ He that spared not his own Son, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ? ” Yet the aptness and the force of this comparison depend wholly upon a nearer affinity in the relation of the Divine Persons than will really exist, if on the part of the Logos, or Word, this relation be superinduced and taken up only contemporaneously, or nearly so, with the Prophetic, the Priestly, or the Regal character of our Lord. And the Apostle will hardly stand exempted from the charge which elsewhere he so explicitly, and perhaps ironically, disclaims, of having employed “ the excellency of Speech and of “ Wisdom ” in thus stating this topic with more advantage, than in strict propriety could be justified.

That

That the terms Father and Son, as applied by our Lord, conveyed to the Jews a natural and essential relation, is evidently clear from their conduct; for we are told, "they sought the more to kill him, not only because he had broken the Sabbath-day, but said also, that God was his Father*, making himself equal with God†."

But I hasten to what may be considered as more direct evidences of the point in question, which lie so thickly interspersed in the writings of the New Testament, that I am concerned principally to examine what shall present themselves most obviously, rather than to select with a discrimination founded in their respective weight and importance.

The expressions, "My beloved Son," "my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," "no man knoweth the Son but the Father," "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father," "the Father loveth his Son," "God sent his Son," "God gave his only-begotten Son," "the Father sent his Son," with others too numerous to be now recited, do all, in their first and obvious import, convey the idea of a natural and essential relation. To these may be added more whose signification, when com-

* Πατέρα ΙΔΙΟΝ λέγει τὸν Θεόν.

† John v. 18.

pared with the context, cannot be otherwise interpreted, without a manifest misrepresentation of the scope and intention of Scripture.

Before I draw any argument from the phrase "only-begotten Son," I should remark upon an observation of this learned writer, that the term only-begotten * is never applied in Scripture to the Word, or Logos; that is, I understand, he is never called the only-begotten Logos, or Word.

To obviate any conclusion which this observation can be supposed to serve, let it be considered, that the terms Word, or Logos, and Son, applied to the second person of the Holy Trinity, are both relative; that they indicate different relations, to God, and the Father; that these relations have no apparent affinity to each other, though inherent in the same subject; so that it may well bear a doubt, how far the phrase, "only-begotten Word," however familiar to later writers, be strictly just and proper: that of these relations, that of Son is that under which our Redeemer is represented to us; that this relation affords an argument, which could not be drawn exactly with the same force from the

* Morosynus (184).

relation which the Word, or Logos, has to God ; an argument of God's love to us, who " spared not his own Son, who gave his begotten Son for us ;" and that in the very chapter in which the Word, or Logos, is introduced as a Divine Person with God and very God, the Glory of this Word, or Logos, and the Glory of the only-begotten are represented as one ; where also the only-begotten Son is represented as being in the bosom of the Father ; an expression apparently assigning to him an equal rank and dignity with the Word itself, who was with God, and was God. For if we could suppose the phrase, " who is in the bosom of the Father," not to imply his eternal existence with God, but simply an intimacy of council, yet that intimacy of council with the Father is more obviously derivable from the essential relation of an only-begotten Son, as he is here called, than from the Incarnation of the Logos, or Word.

The language of our Lord's final prayer before his sufferings, in the 17th of St. John's Gospel, conveys throughout evidences of the Eternal Generation of the Son.

The words here are, " Father, glorify thy Son, " glorify thou me with thine own self, with " the glory which I had with thee before the " world

“ world was.” “ Father, I will that they also
 “ whom thou hast given me, be with me
 “ where I am, that they may behold my glory
 “ which thou hast given (or gavest) me ; for
 “ thou lovedst me before the foundation of
 “ the world.”

Now the terms, “ Father,” repeatedly here used, “ glorify me with thine own self,” “ for
 “ thou lovedst me, before the world was,”
 “ before the foundation of the world,” compared with the terms elsewhere used, “ only Son, beloved Son, only-begotten Son,” must lose all obvious signification and import, singly and in construction, with those, who do not collect from them the relation of Son antecedent to our Lord’s incarnation ; a doctrine which need not, and in truth cannot be avoided, or concealed, or given up, lest Arians make an undue advantage of it : for if they do this, they must do it in neglect, or by the manifest perversion, of the whole tenor of Scripture.

Again, in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the eternal Sonship of our Lord is so obviously implied throughout, and so clearly asserted in some places, that nothing but too eager an anxiety to reconcile supposed difficulties, and a desire to simplify the subject matter of Revelation, in order to render

der it a more ready object of belief, the impropriety of which conduct no one disclaims more decidedly, or more ably, than our Author, could induce any one so well disposed to the general doctrines of Revelation thus to overlook the plain and obvious sense of so connected an argument. The Son of God is there said to have made the worlds, and, in reference to this essential relation to the Father, to be "the brightness of God's glory, and the image of his substance." He is there called the first-born: the dignity of his filial relation is stated as the ground of his preference to Angels, of whom it is said, "Let the Angels of God worship him." But "unto the Son," the Holy Spirit is cited as saying, "Thy throne, O God, endureth for ever." Again, "Thou, Lord, hast laid the foundation of the earth;" agreeably to what our Lord himself hath said in his final address to the Father, where he speaks of the Glory, which the Father gave him "before the foundation of the world."

But to invalidate the force of one term in this chapter, it is said, that the word first-born * signifies sometimes eminence and distinction, not simply priority of birth. If this

* Πρωτοτοκος.

be granted, it cannot at least be asserted in this place, nor indeed in any, where the metaphor is not explained by the context or the subject-matter. Nay, if it could be proved to be figurative in that remarkable passage of the Epistle to the Colossians, "first-born of every creature *," it could only then be construed, eminent *before* every thing created: for it there follows, for all things are created by him and for him, and he is *before* all things; so that this eminence, or distinction, must here include not only priority of rank, but of time, or birth also. And when, in the subsequent verses, he is called "the first-born from the dead;" the phrase, though figurative, conveys a real priority of time; for he was truly the first, or first-born of those who were to die no more. The two latter, therefore, of the three places quoted, admit of a real and true priority of time; and the first, that in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is that wherein it is said, "When he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world†," that is, when he who before had the relation of first-begotten, was made incarnate in the world.

Once more: If St. Paul, in this Epistle to the Colossians, says, all things were created

* Πρωτοτοκος πασης κτισινος.

† Εισαγαγει πρωτοτοκον.

by him, the first-born, St. John says, all things were made by him, the Word, or Logos. The first-born, therefore, and the Word, were the same one existence before the foundation of the world. But the Word was God, and with God: the first-born, therefore, was God, and with God: the first-born was therefore contemporary, if I may so speak, with the Word and with God.

Again: The Word was God; the first-born, or Son, therefore, here mentioned by St. Paul, was God; and therefore "in the beginning," or from all eternity, God, and Son of God.

I will now submit to your consideration a short remark upon the only passage of Scripture, which, so far as I know, could give any colour of positive or direct support to our Author's hypothesis.

It is that containing the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary by the Angel. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God."

I have, I trust, already shewn, that our Lord had a prior claim to the title of the Son of God; a claim to it in an higher and more proper sense of that relation, than can be de-

duced from the incarnation of the Word, or Logos, by the conception of the Virgin Mary.

Now the reason assigned for this denomination by the Angel to the Virgin, cannot be supposed to exclude another, more essentially proper, though it did not seem good to Divine Wisdom to declare it on this occasion. It is sufficient that the reason given was calculated to satisfy the inquiries of the Virgin, and delivered in terms familiar to the apprehension.

St. Luke, in the very genealogy of Christ, calls Adam likewise the Son of God, in a sense obvious enough, yet figurative. In a sense very similar, does the Angel here say of Christ, that he shall be called the Son of God; because he was to derive his human nature in a peculiar manner from God, and be made man by means which were supernatural.

He who would give a stronger, or an higher sense to the denomination here used, must allow the point which our Author means to deny, that one essentially related to God, as Son, was born of the Virgin; which is the true doctrine, though not, I apprehend, deducible from this place.

There

There is likewise a passage in the * first Epistle to the Corinthians, the supposed difficulty of which would, it is apprehended, be much relieved by the hypothesis here opposed; a passage which seems to have had its influence in confirming, or perhaps in forming, the opinion of this learned Writer.

It is, " then shall the Son also be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all † : " shall be subject, or shall subject himself, that is, shall surrender His Mediatorial office, and kingdom, with all its power; in allusion probably to the very words used by our Lord, of his mediatorial power. " The Father loveth the Son, and hath given *all things into his hand.*"

But were the difficulty of this passage greater than it appears to be, the interpretation proposed, however satisfactory it might seem in this place, would be ill purchased by a scheme which would involve the whole substance of the New Testament in difficulties the most embarrassing; and that, against the decided judgment of the Catholic Church, from the earliest ages to the present time.

* xv. 28.

† ὁπότε αὐτῷ.

For the Nicene Creed, how little soever may be the degree of credit which the learned Author gives to Eusebius's copy of it, containing the clause " begotten of his Father " before all worlds," will, notwithstanding, carry upon the face of it the universal consent of the Churches in which it has been thus received. And the clause itself, whether inserted or not by the Council of Nice, as it is evidently borrowed from Creeds more antient, will be a strong ground of presumption that it contains the faith of the more primitive Churches.

Nay this Creed, as it is alledged to have been presented and sanctioned by that Council without this clause, will indisputably still convey the same doctrine; for it is clearly the Divine nature of our Lord, before his incarnation, which is there thus described. " And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of " God, born of the Father, only begotten, " that is, of the substance of the Father, God " of God, light of light, very God of very " God, begotten, not made, consubstantial " with the Father, by whom all things were " made;" then follows, " who for us men " and for our salvation descended, was in- " carnate, and made man," &c. So that from this Creed alone, without the clause in question,

question, without an appeal to former Creeds, or to the testimony of the earlier Fathers, we may safely presume that the doctrine of Christ's eternal generation was an article in the faith of the earliest Churches.

If I have satisfactorily proved that it is clearly and necessarily the doctrine of Scripture, I shall now be allowed to make the conclusion, that as the relation of Son in the Godhead implies of necessity derivation and subordination, that derivation and subordination must be consistent with what the Scriptures elsewhere assert of the real and true Divinity of the Son, and of his Unity of Nature with the Father.

Nor is there any difficulty in admitting the eternal generation of the Son, which does not attach as closely to the idea of an eternal Word, or Logos; for no possible idea can be affixed to the use of the term Logos, which "was in the beginning, and which was with God, and which was God," which does not, and has not rested in the expressions Verbum, or Ratio, or Sapientia, the Word, or the Reason, or the Wisdom of God. But the idea contained in any of these terms, if admitted, according to human conception implies a derived existence or relation. And herein exactly is the force of the mystery. If the terms Father, Son,

Son, the divine Logos, Word, Wisdom, and such like, when applied to the first and second Persons in the Holy Trinity, convey nothing analogous to the ordinary sense of those words, they convey no revelation at all; if carried to the full extent of what the terms signify when applied to human nature, they will convey, what the first principles of Reason and Revelation tell us cannot be true of the Godhead, as well as what expressly contradicts those other passages of Scripture, wherein we learn, that the Logos, or Word, is coexistent and consubstantial with God; and that the Son is that Logos, and therefore coexistent and consubstantial with the Father. Consequently the analogy pointed out by these terms can apply, and on the authority of Scripture does apply, in common to the human and divine nature in a limited degree, and so far only as will admit the derived relation of a Son, and the Word, to be consistent with an equality and co-existence of nature with God and the Father.

To carry an analogy, declared by Revelation, beyond the clear and express terms of Scripture, is presumptuous, and can only, upon a subject above our comprehension, lead to error, embarrassment, and contradiction; whilst to exclude, or limit any relations in the

the Persons of the Godhead expressed, or conveyed to us in the clear signification of Scripture language, because we do not, or cannot fully comprehend them, with a view to render them easier to our conception, is to contract the subject-matter of Revelation, and therefore cannot be less improper ; consequences these, on either side, which can only be avoided by a strict regard and patient adherence to what is WRITTEN.

THE END.

1 2 3

The Tenets of the Church expressed for con-
veyed to us in the clear signification of Script-
ure language, because we do not, or cannot
fully comprehend them, with a view to render
them agreeable to our conception, it is to consider
the subject-matter of 7 DE 65 and therefore
cannot be less improper; consequences there-
of either which can only be avoided by
a strict regard and patient adherence to what
is written.

THE END